



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Sherry Henry:

Good morning,

Great news! We are extending our deadline for accepting nominations for the Governor's Tourism Awards by one more week. Submissions are now due on **Friday, April 23 at 5:00 p.m.**

We know we pushed the deadline early this year and we just don't want to miss any nominations that highlight some of the incredible work our industry has accomplished this past year. Winners will be announced at the Governor's Conference on Tourism in July.

Since we're on the topic of the Governor's Conference – registration is now open for the 30th Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism! This informative event is **the** premier educational and networking event for our industry. It is filled with practical ideas from the industry's top experts that you can take back to your communities and immediately apply to your program of work. You'll get the latest information hospitality and tourism, network with more than 500 of your colleagues, and learn about products and services from exhibiting sponsors.

More information is below in the **AOT News** section.

Have a great week!

AOT News

The DEADLINE is Here (REALLY)! One Week Left to Send in Nominations for Governor's Tourism Awards!

AOT invites you to review the 2010 award categories and guidelines and submit nominations of individuals or organizations that have made a significant contribution to the tourism industry.

The winners will be awarded at the Governor's Tourism Awards Luncheon on Tuesday, July 13. All submissions must be received by April 16, 2010. Please visit the Governor's Conference on Tourism section of www.azot.gov for award categories, guidelines and nomination forms.

Registration is Now Open for the 30th Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism

The Governor's Conference on Tourism is Arizona's only all-industry educational and networking conference for members of the hospitality, travel and tourism industry. Take home practical ideas from the industry's top experts, hear the latest in hospitality and tourism, network with more than 500 fellow professionals, and learn about products and services from exhibiting sponsors. Registration and conference details are available online now. Questions? Call 602.265.2252 or email info@aztourismconference.com.

"Celebrate Arizona" Draws more than 150 Industry Representatives to Florence, AZ!

Last week, Arizona Highways Television launched "Celebrate Arizona," a new community outreach program focusing on building great dialog between community leaders. The first "Celebrate Arizona" event was held in Florence, Pinal County. Arizona Highways Television and its industry partners, the Arizona Office of Tourism, APS, Wells Fargo Bank, Arizona Lottery and the Arizona Department of Commerce, participated in a panel discussion with community members from across Pinal County offering a great dialog with community leaders about issues related to their area. Four more "Celebrate Arizona" events are scheduled to be held throughout Arizona.

Here is the link to see some highlights of AOT at the "Celebrate Arizona" event

Upcoming Events & Activities

[French Tour Operator Road Show](#)

Date: April – May

Location: Lille, Toulouse and Nantes

[Japanese Receptive Operator Sales Mission \(Las Vegas\)](#)

Date: April 17

Location: Las Vegas, NV

[AAA/CAA FAM Tour](#)

Date: April 28 – May 2

Location: Glendale, Greater Phoenix Area, Grand Canyon and Wickenburg

Industry News

U.K. Bookings to the U.S. Down in '09

The Commerce Department says U.K. bookings to the U.S. ended 2009 on a disappointing note, leading the trend of declines registered from other countries last year. U.K. tour operators reported that 2009 bookings were down 10 percent to 15 percent, on average, compared to 2008. For the first quarter of 2010, U.K. tour operators projected that bookings to the U.S. would be about the same as in the first quarter of 2009. Approximately one-fifth of the trade projected higher bookings in the first quarter compared to the same period of 2010. Actual 2009 arrivals from the U.K. totaled 3.9 million, down 15 percent from 2008. *(Special to TA; Travel Advance, April 13)*

Companies Weigh Value of Travel

Companies are sending more of their workers back on the road this year after having slashed travel budgets and halted trips to save money during the recession. But even as the economy slowly rebounds, many business analysts and advisers say businesses will continue to carefully weigh when travel is necessary and when it makes more financial sense to have a staff member stay put and connect with a client or colleague by video screen or conference call. "Right now, the focus for our members is looking at whether that trip brings value back to the company," says Megan Costello, executive director of the Association of Corporate Travel Executives.

"There's a shift, a new way of doing things that I don't think will go away." To make that first sales call, launch a product or close a deal, corporate travel experts such as Costello say businesses will probably decide a staff member needs to travel and see a client face-to-face. But internal meetings are increasingly taking place through video conferences or Webcasts. Business travel dropped precipitously last year. The U.S. Travel Association says roughly \$215 billion was spent on business travel in 2009, down from \$244 billion in 2008. But the travel industry is predicting an uptick this year. *(Page 1B, USA Today; Travel Advance, April 15)*

Restaurants See a Slow Recovery from the Recession

Restaurants all over the country are beginning to see signs of a potential recovery after a dismal 2009, says The New York Times. Sales at some restaurants have risen in the last few months, and the industry has hired thousands of additional workers. "There's no question about this," said Harry Balzer, chief industry analyst at the NPD Group, a market research firm that tracks sales at 47 restaurant chains with a total of 103,000 outlets. "There's a recovery going on." Balzer said that March sales at restaurants open for at least a year were up 1 percent compared with March of last year. While this might not seem like much, it broke a string of 10 months of negative sales. Still, many restaurant owners and executives said they expected the rebound to be slow and halting. *(Page B1, New York Times; Travel Advance, April 15)*

Consumers Carry Recovery Forward, If Slowly

The consumer is awakening, providing a welcome boost to the economic recovery even as inflation remains well under control, USA Today reports. "Consumers are increasing expenditures amid positive stock market wealth effects and the early gains in labor income," said Michelle Meyer of Barclays Capital. Consumer spending was a bright spot, as sales rose in New York, Cleveland, Richmond and Kansas City Federal Reserve districts. Tourism is on the upswing, with hotel occupancy rising in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. But Atlanta said corporate bookings at high-end resorts were sluggish. *(Page 3B, USA Today; Travel Advance, April 15)*

Hotels Compete on Bathrooms

Bedding was all the rage several years ago. Then it was flat-screen television sets and high-speed Internet. Now, it's the bathroom, says The Wall Street Journal. Once thought of as just a functional space to wash and groom, the bathroom has become a fairly simple and at times cost-effective way for hotels to set themselves apart as they compete for smaller numbers of business and leisure travelers. "Owners, manager and developers are spending increasingly more time on the bathroom experience," said Alan Tantleff, managing director of Hotel Asset Value Enhancement Inc. "Beds are the best they've ever been so that's out, so we're returning to bathrooms," says Bjorn Hanson, a professor at New York University and a hotel-industry expert.

Many hotels are turning to small, cost-effective upgrades that fit with a no-frills attitude adopted by many Americans during the recession, Hanson says. Still, some high-end hotels are making more-sweeping changes to the bathrooms, including installing television sets in mirrors to light-changing "chromatherapy" in bathtubs and showers. *(Page D5, Wall Street Journal; Travel Advance, April 15)*

Talking Stick Resort and Casino Ready to Welcome Gamblers

Sometime around dawn, the 15-story Talking Stick Resort is scheduled to welcome gamblers to the Valley's largest casino hotel.

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community is completing a \$440 million project with a 240,000-square-foot Casino Arizona gambling hall. Players can try their luck at 800 slot machines and 50 tables of blackjack, poker and other card games.

Talking Stick will add close to 500 rooms to metro Phoenix's inventory of more than 60,000 rooms at a time when tourism demand remains stunted by the economy.

But resort executives are optimistic that they are entering the hospitality market with a great product at the end of a two-year slump.

"We're seeing the country coming out of the recession," said Russ Burbank, Casino Arizona chief operating officer. "We can take the Valley out of the funk and bring it back."

To do that, Talking Stick has put together a lodging and entertainment package that rivals Scottsdale's resorts. It offers convention space, 36 holes of golf, a spa and some Las Vegas casino-hotel flourishes thrown in.

A 640-seat showroom will feature upcoming shows with George Clinton, Brian Wilson, Clint Black, Smokey Robinson, Cheap Trick and Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.

Talking Stick features 10 lounges and eight restaurants, including an all-day buffet, martini and cigar bar and the Orange Sky fine-dining room on the 15th floor. Private dining coves and an outdoor seating area offer sunset views of Camelback Mountain and the McDowell Mountains. Even the restrooms have a view at Orange Sky.

Tourism leaders said Talking Stick is a great addition that will bolster Scottsdale's tourism.

"It's a package that is difficult to compete with," said Rachel Sacco, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau president. "We're lucky it's here on this side of town."

The hotel at Talking Stick, with a clean, contemporary design by FFKR Architects, is scheduled to open half its rooms within a week and the remainder by June 10, Burbank said.

A standard room of just under 500 square feet will be \$300 in season and \$100 in the summer. A 2,000-square-foot presidential suite is \$3,500.

All the hotel rooms are non-smoking.

Smoking is allowed in the casino but restricted in the poker room and a small area of slot machines. The casino floor is elevated by 18 inches to allow an upward air flow to vent smoke, Burbank said.

Talking Stick has added about 550 workers and that will push employment to about 3,000 in the tribe's two casinos along Loop 101 east of Scottsdale. That number includes about 400 tribal members, Burbank said.

The casino will replace a 120,000-square-foot casino that operated for about 11 years in temporary buildings. That casino was set to close at 2 a.m. today. Casino Arizona at Talking Stick Resort was expected to open at 6 a.m. (*The Arizona Republic, April 15*)

U.S. Reports on Bookings from Germany, Japan

The Commerce Department reports that Germany bookings to the U.S. ended with signs of a potential return to positive growth, as 44 percent of trade reported an increase in bookings in the fourth quarter of 2009 compared to the same period in 2008. However, German tour operators reported that 2009 bookings were flat, on average, compared to 2008 bookings. On average, the German trade projected bookings to be on a par for the first quarter of 2010, with a hint of growth to come. Meanwhile, bookings to the U.S. from Japan were down 4 percent to 9 percent, on average, in the fourth quarter of 2009 compared to the same period in 2008. Eighty-one percent of Japan tour operators reported that bookings decreased in the fourth quarter of 2009, with 38 percent reported that bookings decreased more than 10 percent. On average, the Japan trade projected bookings for the first quarter of 2010 to be about the same as in the first quarter of 2009. (*Special to TA; Travel Advance, April 16*)

Travel Leaders Finds U.S. Leisure Travelers Back on the Move

Travel Leaders says leisure travel is picking up quickly and that U.S. travelers are once again on the move. Over 63 percent of respondents to Travel Leaders' nationwide consumer travel trends survey indicated they had already taken at least one trip this year and over 77 percent indicated that they take will two or more leisure trips through the remainder of 2010. The online survey was conducted in March and includes responses from 800 consumers, predominantly comprised of Travel Leaders' clientele throughout the U.S. (*Special to TA; Travel Advance, April 16*)

Tourism Industry for 2010 Show Signs of Improvements

While hard data for early 2010 are not yet available for most states, anecdotally at least, state tourism chiefs believe 2010 is turning out to be a better year than 2009. Some report strong bookings for summer and into fall. Others see a steady but a bit slower recovery culminating sometime into 2011. These were among the gleanings from several state tourism commissioners attending Travel South USA's Travel South Showcase in Birmingham this week. Joe David Rice, tourism director for the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, said hoteliers have told him that advance bookings are steadily improving. He believes "it's going to be a good year" and probably better than 2009 with several new attractions on tap.

Similarly, Betty Carver, commissioner of the West Virginia Division of Tourism, said "we've held our own but we're keeping our eye on the gas pump." More than 90 percent of West Virginia's visitation comes from the drive market, so gas prices impact consumer travel decisions to that state. "When the economy is down, Kentucky does very well," said Mike Cooper, commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Travel. "We're viewed as value." Alisa Bailey, president and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corp., said her state's new approach to tourism marketing is centered around attracting more Generation X travelers. She said research shows Gen Xers spend 50 percent more than baby boomers while on vacation. Visitation across the South will be driven this year by such new attractions and features as a new international airport in the Panama City, Fla., area, a new mile-long boardwalk in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and the new \$195 million NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, N.C. (*www.TravelAgentCentral.com*, 4/13; *Travel Advance*, April 16)

Without Tourism, Americans Pay More in Taxes

Without the tax revenue generated by travel to and within the U.S., American taxpayers would have to pay an average of \$950 more per household on April 15-"tax day"-according to data released by the U.S. Travel Association. According to U.S. Travel, travel spending by U.S. and international visitors resulted in more than \$111 billion in tax revenue for federal, state and local governments in 2009; of that, \$77.3 billion came from leisure travel and \$34.2 billion from business travel-including \$13.6 billion from meetings and conventions. "The leisure or business traveler staying at the nearby hotel, eating at a local restaurant, shopping or visiting a local attraction is keeping your local economy vibrant and putting money in your pocket," said Roger Dow, U.S. Travel Association president and CEO. (*www.MiMegasite.com*, 4/15; *Special to TA; Travel Advance*, April 16)

SAVE the DATE: Arizona Highways Travel Show – May 22 & 23

The Arizona Highways Travel Show provides an opportunity for communities, along with industry-related organizations and companies to promote their tourism destinations directly to potential customers in the Phoenix market.

The Arizona Highways Travel Show had an extremely successful inaugural show last year and looks to build upon that success. More than 100 exhibitors participated in last year's event where more than 3,000 attendees were looking for travel locations and things to do in the summer and fall in Arizona.

Show Details:

Arizona Highways Travel Show

Phoenix Convention Center – Hall F

May 22 & 23, 2010

10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

To register for a booth at the show:

www.arizonahighwaystravelshow.com

Booth prices start at: \$650.00 – *opportunities to share a booth are available*

Rich Ripley

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Calendar of Events

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!

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